

GENERATIONAL COHORTS AFFILIATION AS A BASIC BEHAVIOURAL DETERMINANT OF CONGRESS TOURISM PARTICIPANTS

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SUMMARY

Purpose

Tourism, as a rapidly transforming area in the sphere of supply and demand, is experiencing constant and rapid change, both at the international and the domestic markets. Such rapid development leads to the emergence of specific forms of tourism. One such form is congress tourism, an important segment of tourism with notable qualitative, quantitative and financial effects on the economy of each particular country which, as such, is becoming increasingly significant by affecting the extension of the tourist season. The development of congress tourism brings multiple benefits for both: organizers and the destination, through the development of infrastructure and innovating supply. In recent decades, the meetings industry has experienced significant growth and has become a truly global phenomenon. Large business gatherings, especially those international, contribute to economic benefits, but also to the image of the hosting destination. Business gathering are the promoters of the destinations. At the same time they are extending the tourist season. Satisfied participants often return to the destination in a private arrangement.

Just like for most organizers, the main economic objective of organizing a congress is profit making. In everyday business, especially in times of global financial crisis, there is an increasing pressure on the congress organizers to ensure positive financial effects of business meetings. Since attendance, or the number of participants, is the best predictor of financial results, attracting more participants becomes their main task, commonly described by the term "delegate boosting". With the increase in the number of congresses and conferences, understanding of participants' congressional experience

assessment is becoming more important than ever. At the same time, many companies are looking for ways of reducing operating expenses. Business trips are among the most common elements on which budget cuts are applied, resulting in a declining congress and conference attendance of national and international participants.

The main purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework to understand convention attendees' evaluation of convention experience based on generational cohort belonging, in order to better understand their return intention. Since there are four generational cohorts in the labor market, this research was conducted with the purpose to identify behavioral intention of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Millennials regarding their congress experience. Specifically, the evaluation of congress experience was investigated through four constructs, namely attractiveness of congress destination, possibility for social networking and professional education, perceived multidimensional value through emotional, functional and social value and behavioral intentions as the last construct. Increasingly fierce competition among congress organizers and host destination suggests the need to understand the return intention of congress attendees, which incurs great impact on the financial benefits of both convention organizers and host destinations. Based on the extensive literature review of congress and business tourism, hospitality and general marketing research, constructs of interest were identified and the hypothetical relationships were established for testing.

For the purposes of the dissertation, data was collected from the primary and secondary sources. Primary data were used in the empirical part of the research. They were collected through an on line questionnaire. Secondary data were collected from domestic and foreign scientific and professional literature and through online sources.

Methodology

University employees elected to scientific backgrounds were the target population for research of the congress tourism participants' behavioural intentions. The main reason for making them target population is the fact that these employees have an obligation to participate in congresses, conferences or symposium, which at the same time enables them to educate themselves, but also to publish their research in congress proceedings. Sample of this research is made up of employees of all state universities in the Republic of Croatia: Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, University of Dubrovnik, University of Rijeka, University of Split, University of Zadar and University of Zagreb.

Out of a total of 1,228 responses, detail analysis and elimination of incomplete on-line surveys, led to the final sample of 981 correctly completed survey questionnaires, with a return rate of 12.94%. For the purpose of the survey, respondents were asked to answer the questions via a on line questionnaire based on experience gained at the last congress held outside their work or residence place and where they stayed for more than 24 hours. The questionnaire consists of 6 units and contains 55 variables.

Techniques of descriptive statistics were used for the presentation of indicator calculations, frequency calculations and graphical representations. The differences in proportions between groups were tested by Chi-square test, and the relationship between

the nominal variables was expressed by the Cramer V measure and the additional quantified ratio of appearance was expressed by univariate logistic regression methods. In order to form a subgroup, cluster analysis was used based on the Ward coupling and Euclidean distance, while the optimal number of clusters was determined by the dendrogram method based on the Calinski-Harabasz pseudo index.

Findings

Based on the conceptual and empirical research, it is possible to confirm the basic scientific hypothesis of this doctoral dissertation: Belonging to a generational cohort influences the behavioral intentions of congress participants. In order to support this claim, the following will summarize the findings of the empirical part of the research and highlight the application of the results in theory and practice.

By analyzing individual segments of a congress destination and how it is perceived by members of the generational cohort, it is possible to conclude the following: accessibility of the congress destination is important to older generational cohorts, especially to Baby Boomers, and it certainly plays a large role in the decision-making process whether to attend the congress. They give less importance to the integral destination product in which they differ from the younger generations. The gastronomic offer as well as the cultural attraction of the destination have been best rated by Millennials, while Generation Y shows the most interest in shops and entertainment in the congress destination. Better perceptions of the congress destination suggest that the destination, along with its accompanying tourist facilities, plays a significant role in congress selection precisely among members of the younger generations such as Millennials and members of Generation Y.

Presentations by prominent speakers in the working field, the possibility of getting insight into changes / new developments in the profession, as well as the ability to exchange knowledge and ideas, are of particular importance to older generations, especially Baby Boomers and to Generation X. Such statistics points out the importance of the professional development for the members of the older generations. Social networking is equally important to Millennials and Baby Boomers. What Millennials disagree with their older counterparts is the claim that attending congress improves their status in the profession. It can be concluded that congress level of expertise is important when deciding whether to participate. Baby Boomers attach greater importance to professional development, while Millennials place emphasis on social networking.

By analyzing the multidimensional perceived value of congress, the following is concluded: there is no statistically significant difference between congress participants, members of different generational cohorts, in assessing the emotional value of congress, which is not the case for the other two multidimensional congress values. Baby Boomers think the cost of participation is proportional to the congress benefits, which means they best evaluate the functional value of congress. Attending a congress helps them feel accepted by the profession and at the same time it improves their status among colleagues, leading to the conclusion that they recognize the importance of the social value of congress.

As the older generation cohorts rate congress better and less attention they give to the congress destination, they are more likely to recommend the congress to their colleagues. When it comes to younger cohorts specifically Millennials, it could be concluded that they have a greater role to play in choosing a congress, so they are much more critical in deciding whether to attend the same congress in the future.

Originality of the research

Conducted research revealed the correlation between belonging to the generational cohort and the way of evaluating congress level of expertise and congress destination, as well as the behavioral intention of the congress participants in terms of their willingness to attend the same congress in the future. Previous research identified the most influential motivators for decisions making about attending the congress. The scientific contribution of this research is evident in the new division of participants based on belonging to the generational cohorts.

The research findings provide meaningful information for associations, host locations, and meeting planners allowing them to identify factors influencing conventions attendees' satisfaction and return intention. Obviously, those findings will be useful to congress organizers in order to create better congress programs and to use more appropriate marketing strategies for reaching target generational cohorts.

Keywords congress tourism, participants of congress tourism, the behavior of congress participants, organizers of congress events, generational cohorts

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